

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
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DEAR MEMBER,

The war from one point of view is a war of metals. Germany is vulnerable, the experts tell us, because she lacks certain necessary metals. The aim of economic warfare is to keep her from replenishing her stocks. Men are creating a situation in which minerals rule the world. War is a dehumanising business.

Yet against this domination by the material the human spirit is in perpetual revolt. The heroic resistance of the Finns has reminded us afresh of the part which human courage, intelligence and love of freedom play in human affairs. It has had a perceptible effect on opinion throughout the world, and the full extent of its influence in the course of history the future alone can show. One of our members in America, a brilliant historian, writes to me: "The Finns have done what nobody else seemed able to do—restored confidence in the creative freedom of man, and broken the spell of mechanical calculations of numbers and techniques. It is the simplicity of their reaction that has taught us again to distinguish between the things that are Cæsar's and the things of the spirit."

## THE PAGANISATION OF EUROPE

Few happenings of our time are more momentous than the persistent uprooting of the Christian tradition over large areas of Europe. The process which has been going on systematically in Russia for twenty years is now being extended to Poland with its strong Roman Catholic tradition. Alike in the areas occupied by the Russians and by the Germans, massacres and removals of the population on a vast scale, inhumanity and destruction of life without precedent in modern times, are accompanied by systematic attacks on the cultural and religious life. Many priests have been killed or sent to concentration camps. Churches have been closed or are permitted to open only for two hours on Sunday. The wrongs against the bodies and the souls of the Polish people have been made known to the world in broadcasts from the Vatican wireless station.

In Germany itself, according to an article in *La Vie Intellectuelle*, the persecution of Roman Catholics has been intensified since the war began. A war levy has been made on the funds of the Churches. A large number of religious and charitable societies have been dissolved and their property confiscated. Churches have been closed on a variety of pretexts. The shortage of paper has been made the excuse for the almost complete suppression of the religious press. A number of priests and leading Catholics have suffered arrest.

Far more is involved than the suppression of the outward and institutional expression of the Christian faith. What is actually happening is described in the words of a young German refugee girl: "I do not know what can be done about



Germany, even if the Nazi regime is overthrown; already two generations of youth are poisoned—my generation and the one younger. And once the Nazi regime goes, the younger generation will find themselves without any anchorage; they have thrown over Christianity, and they have not even the foundation of the home and family to build on, for they have thrown that away also.”

If she is right, as the writer in the *Lancet* who tells the story says, then a lot of the glib talk about war aims merely touches the surface of the problem both of Germany and of Europe; for it goes deep into the dark places of the human mind and spirit.

## THE CHINESE AREAS UNDER JAPANESE CONTROL

It is not only in Europe that the cause of civilisation and humanity is suffering a serious set-back. Reliable information is available regarding the conditions in the areas of the provinces of Kiangsu and Anhwei under the reformed government set up by the Japanese. About one-fifth of Kiangsu and one-twelfth of Anhwei are subject in greater or less degree to its authority.

The personnel of the administration is greatly inferior to that of former times. The number of old men and untrained men is very large. Many are opium smokers, and in smaller localities officials are drawn from the criminal and lower elements of the population. There are a few decent officials who are doing what they can to make the best of a bad situation. The Japanese control is exercised in the main by the power of appointment and dismissal of the holders of office. There is an elaborate system of spying and delation.

Hospitals have been provided in two or three cities and some steps have been taken to care for public health. These provisions are, however, inferior to those which existed before the occupation, and are subject to many abuses. There is practically no relief work. In education there is a slow and slight recovery from complete stoppage. There is no thought of higher education. Secondary schools are less than a tenth of the former number, and primary schools barely one third. The quality is even less than the quantity.

The sale of narcotics is a thriving business. The drug problem is incomparably worse than before the war. Opium is a major source of revenue. The use of heroin is widespread.

Next to nothing is being done for the improvement of agriculture and industry. In the few semi-industrial cities in this region not a single factory is known to remain in Chinese hands. While a number of textile and flour mills have been set going the total output and employment do not reach a third of the pre-war figures. The new conditions have brought poverty and despair for all but a few privileged elements of the Chinese population.

## EVACUATION

In the vast shift of population resulting from the war, the movement of people, mainly children, from large cities into the country under the Government evacuation scheme is only a fraction of the whole. There is no means of assessing the full extent of the migrations due to military movements, to the transfer of factory workers in consequence of the expansion of arms production, to the removal of business houses and Government departments and to the movements of private individuals. These migrations have led to a very considerable redistribution of population. The general tendency seems to be to reduce the numbers in the eastern part of England and increase them west of the Pennines.



These far-reaching changes call for a radical reconsideration of policy by the churches in order to make the most effective use of their available resources. New forms of co-operation are essential to meet the new needs, and to avoid wasteful duplication of effort. Present conditions give an added cogency to the facts and arguments relating to the work of the Free Churches which were put forward by the late Dr. J. H. Shakespeare during the last war in his book *The Churches at the Cross Roads* (Kingsgate Press, 6d.).

An important debate on the Government evacuation scheme for children took place last week in the House of Lords on the motion of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It drew from the President of the Board of Education an assurance that compulsory school attendance in the evacuation areas will again be enforced.

One of our members who has a wide knowledge of conditions in the reception areas has written to me about their needs and opportunities, and I have included some of this information in the notes on the following page.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

I have had many letters of appreciation (and some of criticism) of the letter by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr in a recent Supplement. Those who liked the letter will be glad to have this continuation of it. It provides a most important clue to an understanding of the present complex situation.

## EDUCATING FOR A FREE SOCIETY

I hoped that our Supplement on this subject would stir things up, and it has done so. More than seventy of our members have written for extra copies, the additional orders amounting to more than 761. This is apart from an extensive use of the Supplement independently of the News-Letter, for which 1,000 reprints have been supplied.

I have also had many letters of vigorous criticism. The Supplement was not intended to do more than open up a vast and important subject. The discussion will be actively followed up in the News-Letter.

Those of you who are interested in the subject ought without fail to secure a copy of the small volume entitled *Education and Social Change*, by Professor Fred Clarke, which will be one of the first batch of C.N.-L. books to be published by the Sheldon Press about the end of this month at the price of 1s. each. Particulars about these will be given next week. Order from your bookseller and not from us.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. De Laan

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## NOTES

**Opportunities in Reception Areas.** (a) *Welfare Committees.* In a number of reception areas welfare committees have been formed representative of all the existing agencies. The agencies serving the needs of the community are many and varied, and the new needs offer the chance of co-ordinating and developing their work. Clergy, ministers and Christian laity have a great opportunity and many are taking advantage of it.

(b) *The Use of Leisure.* In a good many instances the Churches are lending their halls for play centres, canteens, or community centres. An extension of this service is desirable wherever it is possible. Volunteers are also needed to help in these various activities in the evenings and during the week-end.

(c) *Health.* There is need for the creation of a public opinion in favour of the provision of infant welfare centres and school clinics for all children in rural areas and small towns. Local authorities have often failed to take advantage of the powers which they possess.

(d) *Personal Advice.* In some instances a Citizens Adviser has been appointed in a village to put enquirers into touch with the appropriate departments for giving help of various kinds. This is an example to be widely followed. Many clergy are giving personal advice to those who need it, putting themselves at the service of parents who come to visit their children and helping them in their decisions.

(e) *Friendship.* Although many of the evacuated mothers have returned, there are often small groups left who need to be welcomed into the life of the village and the fellowship of the Church. There are also many newcomers such as teachers, nurses and members of Government departments who are in need of hospitality and friendship. There is a feeling in some quarters that the clergy only visit in order to get people to come to Church. Where simple acts of kindness and friendship are shown without any ulterior motive they are deeply appreciated and seldom forgotten.

**A Valuable Leaflet.** A leaflet entitled "Village Life in War Time" has been issued by the regional office of the National Council of Social Service at 7, Hills Road, Cambridge. It describes the problems of villages to-day and the ways in which they can be met. The

first essential is information regarding sources of help and knowledge of the new laws and regulations. The second is a means of making this available to those who need it. The third is the pooling of resources so that the maximum of value can be obtained with the minimum of effort. The leaflet contains suggestions regarding the ways in which help can be given.

**Broadcast Talks.** Under the general title "A Christian Looks at the World," the B.B.C. has arranged for a series of thirteen talks which bear directly on issues in which the News-Letter is specially interested. They relate to the question whether Christians can enter decisively into the life of to-day to re-direct human energy and social relations or whether a Christian civilisation has ceased to be a live possibility. To answer this question intelligently and practically it is necessary to know the factors which are shaping the modern world and the views of man and of society which challenge those of Christians. The series of talks will examine in turn the spiritual struggle and the forces at work in Germany, in Russia and in Great Britain. The talks will be given on Fridays from 7.40 to 8.0 p.m. The series will begin on February 16th with an introductory talk by Mr. J. Middleton Murry.

**The Church in Holland.** A Dutch correspondent writes: "Christians in Holland are groping their way in regard to the war, and I think I am not far off the mark in saying that in a neutral country there are peculiar difficulties for Christian people to crystallise their attitude in regard to the problem of war, and of this war in particular. This is due partly to the fact that many feel crushed by the overwhelming force of events and realise that a small people cannot exert any considerable influence in international affairs. On the other hand many tend to be extremely cautious in their opinions through an extreme love of impartiality and objectivity. This is perhaps one of the chief spiritual dangers of people in neutral countries, since it easily leads them to blur in their minds the real issues of the present struggle."

**Finland.** Dr. Paton asks us to thank readers of the News-Letter for their generous response to the mention of Bishop Lehtonen's work for the evacuated population in Finland. He has received numerous gifts, mainly in small sums, amounting to £77.



JANUARY 14th, 1940

## WRONG ANSWERS TO UNANSWERED PROBLEMS

In my last letter I stated the right and duty of the Christian to share in achieving justice in this world, and maintained that this right and duty cannot be savoured at the moment when the contest of power, which belongs to the very nature of politics, issues in open hostilities.

I wish now to emphasise the other perspective of the Christian faith, which prompts us to humility in our struggle against the foe and leads us to examine ourselves in order that we may not become guilty of the sins against which we contend. Unfortunately, the Christian sense of sin is usually presented in such general and vague terms as to have no immediate and specific relevance to the problems which arise in the crises of history. It often happens in consequence that sensitive spirits outside the Church are more conscious of particular evils in our corporate life than Christians are.

If we apply the Christian doctrine of the sinfulness of all men to the present historic situation, it is seen to be a principle of interpretation which both clarifies contemporary events and is justified by an analysis of them.

To put the matter briefly, the contemporary situation is that *what is still left of a "Christian" civilisation is forced to contend against monstrous evils, all of which, upon close analysis, reveal themselves to be fruits of its own vices, wrong answers to its own unanswered problems and accentuated forms of its own decay.* This may be shown in greater detail.

### THE WORSHIP OF POWER

The Nazi worship of power for its own sake and the belief that ability to seize power establishes the right to rule over Europe is the culmination of various strains of thought and life which have largely

dominated Western civilisation since the Renaissance.

Machiavelli contributed to it by making the ruler a law to himself in practice, though he did not deny that in principle power should be subordinate to a higher system of values.

Thomas Hobbes made the State morally independent of any higher authority, because he saw no other way to check the boundless self-will of individuals. His cynicism may be regarded as a corruption of Christian pessimism; it changed the Christian doctrine that men were in essence (i.e., according to their original creation) good, but that their goodness and freedom had become corrupted by sin, into the simpler doctrine that men, according to their essential nature, were evil.

Nietzsche made the great stream of the romantic movement contributory to the glorification of power. While Nazi racialism was foreign to his cosmopolitan outlook, and while Nazi propaganda is more corrupt than his theory of the "honest lie," he nevertheless helped to lay the foundations of the contemporary decadence in which power is regarded as its own justification.

The worship of power cannot be got rid of by pious moralising and the simple assertion that right makes might and not might right. The truth is that the worship of power is the consequence of a naïve moral view, existing both in Christian and in secular forms, which fails to understand the relation between power and life. It does not see that all life is a contest of power and that there is no easy way to arrive at a position above and beyond it wholly subject to the control of reason.

The worship of power is the Nemesis of all modern secular religions, including secularised forms of Christianity, which



fail to understand the meaning of the Christian insistence that power and goodness are perfectly united only in God, and that this goodness is revealed in history only by a Saviour who is completely powerless, and dies upon the Cross. To regard that death upon the Cross as a moral possibility which every man can emulate obscures the tragic character of human history. Power can be made the instrument of truth and goodness in history only if it is recognised that every attempt to do this is necessarily tentative and provisional. To try to extricate the "reason" of man from the conflict of power can lead only to disillusion. From the resulting despair and meaninglessness of life the worship of power seems to offer an escape; but in the end it aggravates what it seeks to overcome.

## RACIALISM AND UNIVERSALISM

The Nazi racial doctrines are vivid and exaggerated forms of the decay of modern civilisation, and in particular of the loss of its universal standards. The rise of the nation is the dominating fact in modern history. The worship of the nation is a form of idolatry which fills the religious vacuum when men have lost faith in God as the source and end of their existence. They then look to the collective life as the source that gives meaning to the life of the individual.

In the combination of nationalism and racialism characteristic of the Nazi movement the worship of the nation, which is common to the whole of modern culture, is at the same time emphasised and reduced to a greater degree of primitivism. The race is contrasted with the nation as closer to nature. It is less the product of human decisions and more the result of natural differences.

It is a tragic anti-climax that a civilisation which began with a simple universalism should end in racialism. The worship of the collective self is not only a form of idolatry to which man has succumbed throughout the ages, more especially in times of spiritual confusion; it is also a proof that his faith in values transcending and disciplining the race and nation was

not profound enough. Racialism and nationalism are to a large extent the consequence of a false universalism.

The bourgeois culture of recent centuries regarded it as an easy task to create universal peace through the doctrines of laissez-faire. It imagined that the self-interest of nations would be held in check by the prudence fostered by international trade. It also imagined that the uniqueness of each race and nation could be easily subordinated. It underestimated the stubbornness of the sin of collective self-interest and at the same time failed to recognise the legitimate place of race and nation in subordination to higher values.

It is very significant that the ally and potential friend of this idolatrous nationalism should be Russia, the home of Marxism, which is another alternative to bourgeois universalism. Marxism was certain that it had got rid of the nation in its paradise of a classless society. Yet the real and ill-concealed source of Stalin's policies is Russian nationalism. Marxist universalism has only a subordinate place in his scale of values. The phrases of Marxist universalism on his lips serve only as an ironical commentary on his actions.

In this combination of primitivism and neo-Marxist nationalism the confidence of the modern man that he could overcome international anarchy through the power of universal reason has suffered cruel disillusionment. Russia and Germany have destroyed the false universalism of our culture. It is necessary for us to rethink completely the problem of escape from the idolatry of self-worship and of return to the worship of the true God. The modern substitutes for the Christian religion are bankrupt.

## THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF MODERN SOCIETY

Both the German and the Russian forms of totalitarianism are attempts to arrest the decay of the economic structure of present-day society. Modern capitalism rests upon the idea that it is not necessary to bring economic activity under either moral or political control. It is believed that if economic motives and policies are



allowed free scope they will produce justice through a natural balance of the various competing forces.

This theory of capitalism was unfortunately invented just at a time when a technical civilisation began to aggravate previously established social inequalities. It made them dynamic, and as a result more and more destructive of peace and justice in society.

The theories of freedom by which bourgeois society has lived are almost completely at variance with the necessities of an inter-dependent civilisation. Germany solved the problem of a disintegrating capitalism by the creation of a national unity which kept all men at work in preparation for the military task of destruction. The democracies, on the other hand, proved that they were not much better than Germany by the fact that unemployment was appreciably arrested only after fear of German attack had tremendously increased expenditures on armaments. In all modern national economies, whether totalitarian or democratic, men were being kept alive only by being employed in the manufacture of implements of death and by being paid for their services with borrowed funds which can never be repaid.

This condition reveals the extent of the disintegration of our economic life and the degree to which a technical society had become suicidal. Its very efficiency not only increases its destructiveness in the moment of open conflict, but also its self-destructiveness in the period of peace.

Our own life, whether we have regard to its religious and cultural presuppositions or to its technical and organisational details, is obviously not a healthy life. There is no soundness either in the aims which inspire the life of our civilisation nor in the organisation which gives them expression. The evil with which Germany confronts the world to-day is, on the one hand, only a caricature of what we ourselves are, and, on the other hand, a false alternative to what we are.

There are tendencies in all modern democratic nations towards the Fascist solution of the social problem. It is the solution into which nations drift if they

do not recognise the seriousness of the social problem which they face. Even after Germany has shown us the caricature of true national unity in a forcibly imposed cohesion, we might drift towards a similar decay and a similar effort to arrest decay if we do not apply ourselves more diligently to the problem of justice.

## THE NECESSITY OF RESISTANCE

The fact that the evil, incarnated in the Nazi State, is the culminating expression of forms of cultural and social decay which are rife among ourselves, does not absolve us from the task of opposing that evil. Society must restrain open crime, even when it knows that the crime is the consequence of its own maladjustments. But this necessity at the same time challenges us to repentance.

## AND OF REPENTANCE

The spirit of contrition with which we meet a foe, knowing that the sins against which we contend in him are in us also, imposes on us both a religious and a moral duty. Religious insight, when it is profound, recognises that the similarity between the evil in him and in us can never be completely overcome. We will always remain sinners. In the end of the day nothing but God's infinite mercy is adequate for the infinite pathos of human existence.

But repentance must also bring forth fruits meet for repentance. The task of reconstructing our civilisation is more difficult than that of defending it against external attack, difficult as the latter may seem in the present moment. This task of defence must not pre-empt our whole minds and hearts. Even while we are engaged in it we must give ourselves to the problem of justice in what is still left of civilisation; and to the profounder problem of the faith by which civilisation lives.

Is not the optimism by which modern civilisation has lived a caricature of the profounder hope of Christianity? And has it not been too simple to take account of all the complex problems of human

existence? It does not see what a difficult task it is to achieve an ordinary and decent justice in the common life of man. It takes too little account of man's organic unity with his tribe and nation. It fails to recognise how great an effort is needed to set a bound to collective self-worship; and to relate power to reason in such a way as to bring reason down to earth and embody it in the actual life of men. In short, it lacks an understanding of the majesty and tragedy of human existence.

## THE TWO FRONTS

The Christian faith has to fight on two fronts. Against all forms of moral complacency it must sharpen the sense of the Kingdom of God as a relevant alternative to every scheme and structure of human justice. It sees history as a realm of infinite possibilities. No limit can be placed upon the higher possibilities of justice which may be achieved in any given historic situation.

But against all forms of Utopianism the Christian faith must insist that sinlessness is not a possibility of historic existence and

that mistaken efforts to achieve it merely result in new forms of anarchy or tyranny. The effort of bourgeois liberalism to transcend the element of power in politics has led to the emergence of a new and more terrible form of tyranny. The Marxist effort to use power in one last effort to eliminate all power from political life and to establish a Utopia has resulted in a dictatorship which can no longer be distinguished from the Nazi dictatorship.

At the dawn of the Renaissance Cosimo de Medici accused Christians of seeking too much. "You have built your ladders to the heavens," he said. "We will not aim so high or fall so low." But this word of a child of the Renaissance can now in turn be directed by Christians against all the secular religions which the Renaissance spawned. They have all committed the sin of the tower of Babel. They all failed to check human pride. They all ended by increasing the evils from which they sought redemption. "We will not seek so high nor fall so low."

REINHOLD NIEBUHR.

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